

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Offers Full U.S. Embrace for Mideast Democratic Change

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Because of its own history and democratic values, the United States must stand with the people of the Middle East and with others who peacefully demand their universal rights and seek greater opportunities, President Obama says.

Speaking in Washington May 19, Obama said the current wave of political uprisings is a response to an unsustainable status quo in the region, and described the suicide of Tunisian fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi, which sparked the first protests in the region, as a reaction to the relentless tyranny of governments that deny dignity to their own people.

“Our own nation was founded through a rebellion against an empire. Our people fought a painful civil war that extended freedom and dignity to those who were enslaved. And I would not be standing here today unless past generations turned to the moral force of nonviolence as a way to perfect our union,” the president said.

The United States believes that repression will fail, that tyrants will fall and that every man and every woman is entitled to certain inalienable rights, he said.

“We have the chance to show that America values the dignity of the street vendor in Tunisia more than the raw power of the dictator,” he said, adding that there must be no doubt on the part of those living in the Middle East that “the United States of America welcomes change that advances self-determination and opportunity.”

The people have risen up on their own, and it is they themselves who will determine the outcome of their efforts, Obama said.

The United States opposes the use of violence and government oppression, and supports universal human rights. It can offer “concrete action” in support of political and economic reforms to help ordinary people of the region achieve their legitimate aspirations for greater freedoms and opportunities, he said.

The energy sweeping the region must be channeled “so that economic growth can solidify the accomplishments of the street” by expanding growth and broad-based prosperity, Obama said.

The president outlined proposed economic support for Tunisia and Egypt, which are undergoing a democratic transition, and said those nations can set strong examples

for the rest of the region by holding free and fair elections, having a vibrant civil society and building accountable and effective democratic institutions.

Obama said his administration has asked the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to present a plan at the upcoming Group of Eight summit on how best to stabilize and modernize the economies of both countries.

In addition, Obama said the United States will relieve Egypt of up to \$1 billion of its debt and channel that money into its medium-term development needs and job creation. It will also guarantee Egypt an additional \$1 billion in loans through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) to allow it to fund additional infrastructure projects and employment opportunities for its young people.

The president proposed an Egyptian-American enterprise fund that would help stimulate private investment and promote job creation, and said the United States will work with the European Union to help boost trade both within and outside the region.

He called for the tearing down of “walls that stand in the way of progress,” such as corruption, bureaucratic red tape and patronage based on tribe or religious sect, and said the United States will help officials and activists develop reforms, increase transparency and help to hold governments accountable.

Obama said the May 1 death of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden had dealt his terror organization a “huge blow,” and added that many in the region had already come to see bin Laden’s agenda, which promoted destruction and opposed democracy, as “a dead end.”

The people of the Middle East have taken their own future into their hands, he said, and “through the moral force of nonviolence, the people of the region have achieved more change in six months than terrorists have accomplished in decades.”

U.S. interests in their region are not hostile to their hopes, but essential to them, he said, because the United States not only has a stake in the region’s stability, but is fundamentally committed to the self-determination of its people.

U.S. Officials Hopeful for Sudan and Southern Sudan

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — American officials who recently visited Sudan and Southern Sudan said they saw encouraging signs despite their political and economic challenges.

Rajiv Shah, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), toured the countries with development officials from the United Kingdom and Norway. At the State Department on May 18, he said he is encouraged by positive developments in Southern Sudan, "especially with commitments that the Southern Sudanese have made to transparent governance, to having an integrated development strategy, to working with donor partners and development partners in a coordinated way."

To assist Southern Sudan's growth, Shah said the United States will host a major development conference in Washington in September for Southern Sudanese to present a vision of their country.

"We expect that a broad range of donor partners, the world multilateral institutions, and private partners and private companies will participate in that important meeting," Shah said.

Conversations with government officials in Southern Sudan highlighted the need to fight corruption and to launch transparency initiatives, in particular how oil revenues are spent, he said.

"We also want to send a strong, coordinated message that too often development assistance is not well coordinated and well organized and everybody tries to do everything," Shah said. "In the South we suggested that the United States will take the lead in donor coordination, especially across the U.K., Norway and U.S. programs."

Princeton Lyman, U.S. special envoy to Sudan, met officials in Khartoum and in Juba to discuss the timely implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and help move both countries forward.

"They will want ... people to continue to be able to trade on the borders, et cetera. I don't think these negotiations are going to be easy, but I think there's a great deal of impetus to reaching the critical decisions that enable the two sides to go forward," Lyman said.

Lyman said the United States is disturbed by continued fighting in Darfur between the Sudanese government and rebel groups. U.S. officials are attending Darfur peace talks in Doha, Qatar.

"My colleague Dane Smith who works full time on Darfur has been spending a great deal of time in Doha with one of his staff to bolster that negotiating process," Lyman said. "It's a hard process, but at least the parties are talking."

Shah said USAID meetings with Sudanese officials in Khartoum focused on addressing the humanitarian

situation in Darfur.

"We highlighted some of the critical challenges for access and safety for humanitarian workers right now and asked for real progress in that area of work," Shah said, adding that USAID asked for partnership to help accelerate recovery efforts.

Shah said USAID works with a range of partners and nongovernmental organizations to learn about the challenges they face and their efforts to diversify their programming "to allow for voluntary resettlement where that is possible" in the Darfur region.

Accountability Could Make Health Promises Come True, Report Says

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — Saving more lives depends on demanding greater accountability from national governments that promise improvement in health programs but fail to deliver. A specially appointed commission announced this finding in Geneva May 19 at a meeting of the World Health Assembly.

"All partners are accountable for the promises they make and the half policies and programs they design and implement," said Jakaya Kikwete, the president of Tanzania, and a co-chairman of the commission that produced the report, *Keeping Promises, Measuring Results*, presented to the World Health Assembly and available on the World Health Organization website.

The report recommends what one commissioner, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, called "bold yet practical measures that will help save the lives of mothers and children living in the world's poorest countries." Here are some of the recommended measures:

- Increasing the number of countries with advanced systems to count, measure and track health landmarks such as births, deaths and causes of death.
- Measuring local data against 11 common indicators of reproductive, maternal and child health.
- Helping countries integrate the use of information and communication technologies in their health information systems.
- Establishing agreements between country governments and development partners to require reporting on expenditures, commitments and outcomes.
- Establishing national accountability mechanisms that are transparent and inclusive of affected parties and recommend action as necessary.

The recommendations for greater accountability presented to the World Health Assembly are consistent

with Obama administration goals outlined in the Global Health Initiative (GHI), launched in 2009. GHI places “a particular focus on bolstering the health of women, newborns and children,” according to a fact sheet on the program.

The GHI provides a strategy to build on global health improvements made in recent years, to achieve further improvements and to establish sustainability for national health systems to perpetuate their activities in the future, according to the fact sheet. GHI goals call for expanding the targets of PEPFAR, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, begun in the Bush administration, to prevent 12 million new HIV infections and to support people receiving AIDS treatment, their families and communities affected by the illness.

GHI makes special provision for women and children, with goals to save approximately 360,000 women’s lives by reducing maternal mortality, and providing appropriate care to prevent the deaths of newborns and children under age 5.

The U.N. secretary-general is pursuing a related endeavor, the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health. It aims to save the lives of 16 million women and children under age 5 by 2015.

The United States sent a delegation of about 25 representatives from government health agencies to the World Health Assembly. U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius led the delegation. On May 19, she urged the assembly to reject a proposal to destroy the last remaining smallpox stores. Preservation of the stores, she says, will allow further research into smallpox.

Lee Ae-ran Helps North Koreans Build a Brighter Future

Having endured eight years in a North Korean prison, Lee Ae-ran escaped to South Korea, earned a doctorate and began helping other defectors. In 2010, she won the U.S. Secretary of State’s International Women of Courage award. We asked several of the 46 women from 35 countries who have won the award about their recent work. This is the fourth response in a series.

By Jane A. Morse
Staff Writer

Lee Ae-ran:

It has been my firm belief that the key to the solution of many North Korea issues is in the hands of North Korean defectors and, therefore, it is important to help them settle in South Korea so that they can be at the center of the process. That is why I have been devoting myself to

developing job training programs and employment assistance programs for North Korean defectors despite many challenges and difficult circumstances.

My challenge at hand is to create more jobs, help defectors settle in South Korea and nurture [talented people] who will take initiative in changing North Korean society in the future.

Properly trained North Korean defectors will play significant roles in pointing North Korean society in the right direction in case of sudden changes.

However, it is immensely difficult to take on an unprecedented task.

Because it is realistically impossible to encourage democratic movement within North Korea now, democracy education for North Korean defectors is essential. However, if we do not associate any kind of defector education with job-related training, the discontented community of North Korean defectors will become a new source of social unrest in South Korea.

Today, there is a huge cultural gap between the two Koreas. Because of the differences in everyday language and technical terminology, South Koreans and North Koreans experience difficulties in communicating with each other, which give rise to a new type of social conflict.

According to a survey, 92 percent of the North Korea defectors experience a language barrier on their job training. With the increasing number of North Korean defectors, there is an urgent need for special programs that train specialized job-trainers for defectors.

The [International Women of Courage] award meant a lot, not just for me but also for women in North Korea and the female defectors both overseas and in South Korea. The award has contributed to provoking interest in North Korea’s human rights issues and women’s issues among highly-regarded mainstream media and encouraging government agencies, politicians, scholars and nongovernmental organizations to pay more attention to developing North Korean human rights and defector policies.

Discrimination against women is a worldwide phenomenon. In societies with worse human rights conditions, women bear a heavier burden of family support. These women face an uphill battle of fighting for women’s rights and social justice while taking care of themselves and their families.

However, the hardship that they face makes their efforts all the more meaningful and honorable. That is why I would like to encourage those who want to follow the

footsteps of women activists. I would like to ask them to join me in a journey full of rewarding challenges.

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